

Patrick Lawrence

It is time for Israel to pay the price

As I consider the mess apartheid Israel has made of itself, of West Asia, of its relations with the rest of the world, and—especially this—of the “unconditional support” it has long enjoyed from the United States, an old advertisement, still famous among Americans, comes oddly enough to mind. It promoted Alka-Seltzer, the indigestion remedy, and featured a fleshy fellow looking miserable after a bout of unwise overindulgence. It was a 30-second spot that ran more than a half-century ago, but the tagline still has a place in the collective memory of Americans: “I can’t believe I ate the whole thing!” the regretful glutton moans.

This is Israel today, having drawn the Trump regime into what is now the epic error of its war against the Islamic State. The Zionist state has gorged for decades on unlimited American weaponry, money, and political cover, certain there would be no price to pay as it waged extravagant campaigns of violence and barbarity against Palestinians and others in West Asia. It has eaten the whole thing, and now comes the indigestion. Now the remorse comes creeping in.

It was clear to me (and certainly others) by mid-autumn 2023, not two months into the Zionists’ genocidal campaign against the Palestinians of Gaza, that “the Jewish state” was on the way to overplaying its hand. As I wrote elsewhere some time later:

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The rest of the world can take only so much pretending that the murder spree in Gaza is a Biblically authorized war against—How does this work?—the

descendants of those phantom, Jew-hating clans known as Amalekites. The Zionist project is at bottom an attempt to make the modern world recognize invocations of ancient wars of revenge, annihilation and race-paranoia, whether or not they ever took place, as legitimizing unspeakable horrors in the third decade of the 21st century.

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Sooner or later, I concluded, “the rational would prevail over the imaginary and mythological—Athens, as the scholars think of it, over Jerusalem.”

It turned out to come later rather than sooner, this moment of reckoning. But as the Zionist army has spread its “seven-front war” to Iran and Lebanon, the extent to which the Tel Aviv regime has misread its cards is at last obvious. A significant corner has been turned. Let the costs now be exacted.

Alon Mizrahi, [the Arab Jew who writes as a bitter critic of the Israeli project](#), said it acutely well a few years ago. The Zionist state, he has written severally in his commentaries, is what results when a regime is licensed to aggress as viciously as it pleases in pursuit of an irremediably racist ideology, beyond all bounds of morality, humanity, law and responsibility, and it will be fully protected, never held to account, never suffer consequences.

It is the Americans who are responsible for this diabolic terror state, having sanctioned its conduct since the Truman administration precipitously recognized Israel 11 minutes after it declared itself at midnight 14 May 1948. Jack Kennedy told Gore Vidal years later that Truman acted in response to a \$2 million bribe received from an early version of the Zionist lobby, and I know of no scholar or historian who has refuted this account.

The Kennedy story captures the very essence of what has gone on since: To an ever-greater extent the Israelis, the Zionist lobbies, and the extensive network of wealthy Jews acting in Israel's behalf have purchased all that unconditional support one American administration after another reassures Tel Aviv is soundly in place.

It took a global debacle of the Iran war's magnitude to shake this irresponsible commitment loose. Not even the years of genocide in Gaza were enough. Maybe it took a regime as incompetent and untethered as Donald Trump's to break the old pattern. Sold by the Israelis on the prospect of another "quick win," Trump and his adjutants wandered into the Iran war and now find themselves desperate to get out of it no matter what the terms they must accept from the Iranians.

The resulting breach between the United States and the Israelis grows wider by the day now, and the damage the Netanyahu regime has done to the old relationship more obvious. Here is Vice-President J.D. Vance last week, as Israel continued bombing southern Lebanon in defiance of the Trump regime's insistence that it desist in accordance with the memorandum of understanding Washington and Tehran had just signed:

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Donald J. Trump is the only head of state in the entire world who is sympathetic to the nation of Israel at this moment in time... If I was in the cabinet of the Israeli government, I might not be attacking the only powerful ally that I have anywhere left in the entire world. You're a country of nine million people. You can't just kill your way out of solving every single national security problem that you have.

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This turn in American thinking has been some time coming but has been heretofore unstated in Washington's policy counsels. And it is not clear at writing how Bibi Netanyahu will respond now that Trump, Vance, and others have made it clear the days of unconditional support and protection are ending. Does the Israeli PM still think the Zionist state can keep eating the whole thing? This is the question.

At writing Bibi continues to insist, in a long, delusory tradition, that Israel can "go it alone" if the U.S. abandons the profligate largesse with which it has long indulged the Jewish state. O.K., Netanyahu has always been long on bravado. Will he now hold to it, as he has in the past? It is another way to pose our question.

In much-followed primary elections held Tuesday in New York, three Democratic Party candidates who rested their campaigns on vigorous support for the Palestinian cause and opposition to the Israelis' crimes defeated competitors with strong ties to A.I.P.A.C, the main Israeli lobby, and wealthy Jewish donors. These results shocked the Democratic establishment, which read them, correctly, as a sign of a profound shift in American public opinion.

Just as an aside, a scholar named Michael Cohen, a Jew prominent in liberal intellectual circles, wrote a note on "X" that has caught the attention of many. "This is a genuinely scary night for New York City Jews."

This caught the attention of many because it is so patently ridiculous and tiresome, so indicative of how so many of Israel's American supporters still assume the Zionist state can continue eating the whole thing—of how such people simply do not know what time it is.

From [*The New York Times* in its Thursday editions](#):

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The results [in New York] underscore the deep fractures in support for Israel within the United States, a trend that already has profound political implications for Republicans as well as Democrats. If the erosion of support continues, it could reshape one of the nation's closest alliances, one that nonetheless remains bolstered by generations of ties, the influence of Israel's remaining supporters and the complexity of U.S. interests in the Middle East.

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As *The Times* rightly points out, the power of the Israeli lobbies and the ungodly sums they have spent bribing the whole of Congress, with some exceptions—a small but growing number—remains formidable. A.I.P.A.C. is spending record amounts to buy various candidates due to run in national elections this autumn. Legislators are now considering revisions to an annual defense bill that will require the State Department, the Commerce Department, and various other federal agencies to cooperate as the U.S. and Israeli militaries fully integrate themselves. Dennis Kucinich, at one time an honorably progressive presidential candidate, [described this in a commentary the other day](#) as “a surrender of American sovereignty.”

This is easily interpreted as an attempt to institutionalize the established U.S.–Israeli relationship so intimately that it is sequestered from electoral politics and public opinion. I do not see that this will work. As *The Times* also notes, the mounting aversion to Israel, the front edge of the *Zeitgeist*, is clear. And it is interesting to watch as a few sensible Israelis still capable of clear sight—and let us respect them, as there seem to be but few—understand very well what time it is.

“There is a condition that can befall small states kept too long under the protection of great powers,” Yonatan Touval begins in [a piece *The New York Times* published in its Wednesday editions](#). Touval, an Israeli student of foreign policy, continues:

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When the protection is generous enough, they can become both militarily formidable but also strategically undisciplined. They grow fluent in force and illiterate in consequence. They acquire the manners of sovereignty without its restraint, because the costs of that sovereignty are borne elsewhere — in arms shipments, guarantees, Security Council vetoes and the patron’s diplomacy. Over time, strategy atrophies. In its place comes the belief that force can substitute for statecraft.

Israel suffers from such a condition.

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Touval’s piece, a measure of new recognitions and new thinking in Israel, appears under the headline, “U.S. Support is Israel’s True Weakness.” How pithily to the point. Touval’s reasoning reads straight out of Alon Mizrahi’s argument, in my view. What was once the outer fringe of Israeli discourse now makes it to the opinion pages of *The Times*, a Zionist-supervised newspaper.

“The problem was not the ‘special relationship’ as such,” Touval continues. “It was the extent to which it had become unconditional.”

And further on:

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Until now, the risk in the relationship seemed mostly America’s: being drawn into wars that its client began or escalated, or being implicated in

actions carried out under the cover of American arms, money and diplomacy. But the liability runs both ways....

The result of continuing this course is already in view—a fortress state, armed beyond measure, striking widely, trusted narrowly, leaning on a patron whose own public is questioning the relationship that Israel treats as assured. That is not sovereignty. It is dependency with a loud voice.

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Touval suggests that if the United States steps back from the old relationship with Israel “it may deepen the siege mentality it is meant to alleviate.” This may or may not be so: I cannot say at my distance. But even if Yonatan Touval’s worry were to prove out, it is no argument whatsoever for continuing unconditional support so that Jewish Israelis can, for a little while longer, eat the whole thing.

Gideon Levy, the respected if nearly solitary voice at *Haaretz*, published [a passionately written commentary 21 June](#), a few days after Trump signed the memorandum with Iran while Netanyahu continued bombing the Lebanese. The piece appeared under the headline, “Donald Trump Has Fulfilled My Dream: For Israel to Pay for Its Actions.”

From it:

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For years, other dinosaurs and I dreamed about international pressure and sanctions as the last way out of the mess. I knew that Israelis would never wake up one morning and say, let’s put an end to all this—to the occupation, to apartheid, to controlling another people—because it’s ugly.

I knew it simply wouldn’t happen. I thought that what worked wonders

against the first apartheid regime, the one in South Africa—sanctions, ostracism and international boycotts that led to its downfall—would also work well against the second apartheid regime, the one practiced in Israel.

I also knew that the key to any change in the international community's attitude to Israel lay in Washington. Without it, there could be no effective international pressure on Israel....

I dreamed about the moment in which Israelis would be forced to recognize that it was impossible to continue this way, with unbelievable arrogance toward the United States and with blatant disregard of the entire world, without paying a price.

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We witness an historic turn in Israel's most important relationship. It is in the right direction, so far as it has gone at this early moment, but this not a matter of mere policy as determined in the counsels of state. More, much more, must also be set in motion. Israel as constituted has no more right to exist than white South Africa did. There must be recourse to justice—restorative, certainly, but at this point the need for retributive justice seems also evident and, I would say, just as pressing.

Israel, having eaten the whole thing, must pay the price for it. How right Gideon Levy is in this. This, not Donald Trump, will allow his honorable dream to come true.

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